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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN IDEALS

BY PRESCOTT F. HALL

GOBINEAU once said, "America is likely to be, not the cradle of a new, but the grave of an old race." Is there, indeed, a danger that the race which has made our country great will pass away, and that the ideals and institutions which it has cherished will also pass?

It seems to be generally agreed that down to the period of fifteen years or so after the close of the Civil War there was a fairly definite American type, which had expressed itself, not so much in literature or art, as in politics and invention, and in certain social ideals. Washington and Lincoln, however different in some respects, both represented a certain type of English civilization, and both stood for certain political, social, and ethical points of view. The original settlers of this country were mainly Teutonic, belonging to what is now called the Baltic race, from northern Europe, which has always been distinguished for energy, initiative, and self-reliance. Impatient of much government, relying upon self-help rather than the paternalism of the State, this race was none the less firm in its allegiance to certain pretty definite religious and social standards. It insisted from the beginning on general education, and where opportunities for schooling were wanting there was nevertheless a wide training given by interchange of ideas in the home, on the farm, in the church, and in the town meeting. In town affairs every citizen was expected to take part, and usually did so, thus conferring a benefit on the community and receiving something in exchange. The result of this common racial origin and of these relatively homogeneous institutions was, as I have said, the amalgamation of the people into a fairly definite national type.*

* Perhaps the best statement of the proper conditions of race mixture is in Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the XIXth Century*,

What has happened since then? To-day, less than one-half of our people are descendants of the original stock and of the early settlers. Since 1820, we have received from Europe and Asia some twenty-eight millions of people. About one-third of these came prior to 1880 and were of races kindred to those already here; in other words, they had a common heritage of institutions if not of language, and were assimilated into the general population with comparative ease. The other two-thirds, the eighteen millions who have come since 1880, have been, on the other hand, of entirely different races—of Alpine, Mediterranean, Asiatic, and African stocks. These races have an entirely different mental make-up from the Baltic race; they bring with them an inheritance of widely differing political and social ideals, and a training under social and political institutions very different from ours. The Slavic races, for example, differ from the Teutonic in temperament as much as the emotional nations of the Mediterranean. The South Italian, which constitutes the largest element in our present immigration, is one of the most mixed races in Europe and is partly African, owing to the negroid migration from Carthage to Italy. The modern Greek is by no means the Greek of the time of Pericles, either in race or temperament. The Hebrew, which constitutes the next largest element of immigration, in spite of long residence in Europe is still, as it always has been, an Asiatic race; while the Syrians, Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus are still more removed from the civilization of northern Europe and America.

This movement of peoples from the Old World to the New is on a scale unprecedented in history, and its effects cannot fail to be profound and far-reaching. What will they be?

Americans have hitherto paid very little attention to this question: first, because they have not considered the difference between hostile and peaceful invasions in history; and second, because they fail to observe that recent immigration is of an entirely different kind from that which our fathers knew. The earlier immigration having been of kindred races and having produced no profound changes, our

vol. i, chap. iv, "The Chaos." He points out that the successful cases of amalgamation have been those where there has been an immigration of kindred races only, and such immigration has continued for a comparatively brief period and then ceased. This was precisely the situation in the United States prior to 1880.

people became used to the phenomenon and took it as a matter of course. At the present time, most of us consider that the movement now going on is similar to that which has been, and anticipate results no different from those previously observed.

If the million people coming every year came not as peaceful travelers, but as an invading hostile army, public opinion would be very different to what it is; and yet history shows that it has usually been the peaceful migrations and not the conquering armies which have undermined and changed the institutions of peoples. To take the classical error on this subject, we have been told repeatedly that, on the one hand, it was the conquering Goths and Vandals, and on the other hand, their own vice and luxury, which cost the Romans their empire. The real cause of the fall of Rome was neither of these things. It was the constant infiltration into Roman citizenship of large numbers of "barbarians"—that is, of races alien in instincts and habits of thought and action to the races which had built up the Roman Empire. For a time, indeed, the mold of political structure and social habit, though cracking, did not break; but the new-comers assimilated the Romans faster than they were themselves assimilated, and in time the mold broke in pieces. In precisely the same way some provinces of France are to-day becoming German, and others Italian, while the Germans are consciously making use of this method in their attempt to Prussianize Poland.

The "barbarians" of the present time, however, do not come from the plateaus of central Asia or from the jungles of Africa; they are the defective and delinquent classes of Europe—the individuals who have not been able to keep the pace at home and have fallen into the lower strata of its civilization.

Formerly, America was a hard place to get to, and a hard life awaited those who came, although the free and fertile land offered rich prizes to those with the energy to grasp them. To-day, the steamship agent is in every little town in Europe; fast steamers can bring thousands in a few days, and wages, often indeed not enough for an American to live decently on, but large in the eyes of the poor European peasants, await the immigrant on landing. There is, moreover, abundant testimony to the fact that much of the present immigration is not even a normal flow of population, but is

artificially stimulated in every possible way by the transportation companies which have many millions invested in the traffic.

Now there are two hopeful attitudes with regard to the possible dangers from this "peaceful invasion." One of them is that we can continue, as we have in the past, to assimilate all this material and turn it into good American citizens. This was the general attitude until recently, and is still the attitude of the average man who does not fear the future. The other attitude is that, although perhaps we cannot do this, although the aliens may to some extent assimilate us, yet the seething of the melting-pot will remove the dross and turn out a product, possibly new, but at any rate as good, if not better, than the old.

It is important to consider the truth of these points of view, because the social and political institutions of any country depend upon the type of its citizenship and are molded by it. Ruskin long ago observed that the only real wealth is human character, and what boots an extended railroad mileage or the fact that all our coal and minerals are dug up or all our trees cut down some years or decades sooner, if at the end our democracy goes to pieces? We have heard much lately of the conservation of natural resources, but the conservation of ideals is surely much more important.

Those who believe that we can assimilate all the aliens who may come usually qualify their belief by saying that, although we may not succeed entirely with the parents, we can succeed with the children, and that the salvation of the situation is the public school. They also point out that many immigrants have had little opportunity for improvement in their own countries and may develop rapidly in a new environment. Now just as the Latin races make a fetish of the State, we Americans are apt to make a fetish of education, and we constantly fail to discriminate between education as the molding of character and education as the imparting of information. Far the larger part of a child's education comes from his home and his companions, rather than from his schooling. Emulation and imitation are the two mainsprings of his growth. We should never forget the somewhat hackneyed truth that education, in general, brings out what is in the man, be it good or bad, and seldom puts much there which was not there before. For this reason it is very questionable whether the small amount of schooling the children of

most aliens receive plays a very large part in the total of influences brought to bear upon them; and it is still more debatable whether it appreciably alters their characters, or does anything more than bring out their inherited instincts and tendencies. Undoubtedly immigrant children crowd our schools because it aids them in the struggle for existence, and is usually paid for by some one else. Undoubtedly, also, many of them obtain high marks and show considerable capacity for storing up information.

Nevertheless, as has been said, schooling is but a small part of the influences to which the child is subject, and the tendency of recent immigrants to crowd into the cities and to settle in racial groups means that a very large part of the influences affecting the children will be those of their neighbors and co-workers of the same race. As in John Bunyan's parable, a small quantity of oil poured secretly and steadily upon a fire will cause it to withstand a large quantity of water poured upon it from all directions. Moreover, to a great extent this water of public-school education will fail to quench hereditary passions, because the latter are so strong that the former will be vaporized, so to speak, and pass off without closely touching them. Dr. Gustav LeBon, in his *Political Psychology*, has thus expressed this phase of the matter:

"Education merely sums up the results of a civilization; the institutions and the beliefs representing the needs of such civilization. If, then, a civilization does not harmonize with the ideas and sentiments of a people, the education setting forth this civilization will remain without effect upon it; in the same way that institutions corresponding to certain needs will not correspond to different needs."

The result in such a case will be, not a true amalgamation of races, but a mixture of peoples as in Austria-Hungary, living side by side, sharing certain interests in common, but never wholly merging into a general national type.

This is, indeed, what many educators like Dr. Charles W. Eliot expect and rejoice in. Dr. Eliot does not share in the second view—that the melting-pot will fuse the various races into one. And he rejoices because, in his view, half-breeds of any races are inferior to their parents, just as alloys of metals are not as valuable as the metals themselves. And he is right. The evidence on this point is convincing. Dr. Alfred P. Schultz, in his *Race or Mongrel*, gives numerous examples drawn from history, one of the most conspicuous

being that of the Jews, who, wherever they have kept their racial purity, have kept also their fine qualities of energy, push, and mental alertness, but have deteriorated rapidly when intermarried with other races. Humboldt and Darwin have declared the same truth. Agassiz, in a well-known passage, says:

“Let any one who doubts the evil of the mixture of races and who is inclined from mistaken philanthropy to break down all barriers between them come to Brazil. He cannot deny the deterioration consequent upon the amalgamation of races, more wide-spread here than in any country in the world and which is rapidly effacing the best qualities of the white man, the Indian, and the negro, leaving a mongrel nondescript type deficient in physical and mental energy.”

The same thing has happened in Cuba, in Mexico, and other countries to the south of us. But is there any danger of this occurring in the United States? It has not occurred in the past because the only race outside of the Teutonic immigrants present in large numbers has been the negro, and the Baltic races have an insurmountable prejudice against intermarriage with the black races. The Mediterranean and Asiatic races, on the other hand, have much less of this feeling. The negro strain in the South Italians has been already mentioned, and there are some examples of intermarriage between negroes and Jews. What would happen if a large Mediterranean population should be colonized in our Southern States and should interbreed with the negro population it finds there? This is not an imaginary possibility, for the dark-skinned races are more likely to settle in the southern part of this country; indeed, it must be so if Major Woodruff is correct in his view that the blond races cannot permanently live south of the fortieth parallel on account of the effects of the light on their nervous systems. Let us assume that some interbreeding with the negroes takes place. Will the descendants of the emotional, fiery Italians submit to the social judgment that a man with a sixteenth or a thirty-second part of negro blood is a colored man who must occupy a position socially, if not politically, inferior? Assuredly not, and thoughtful Southerners are already alarmed by this prospect and have announced through many of their industrial conventions that they do not desire the immigration of southeastern Europeans. The Western States feel the same way about Asiatics, both for racial and economic reasons.

Even if the result of the immigration of southeastern Europeans to the South should not immediately be an interbreeding, the result may be to add other problems to the one we already have there. Mr. Booker T. Washington, who has recently been investigating conditions in Europe, expresses this view when he says:

"I greatly fear that if these people should come in large numbers and settle in colonies outside the cities, where they would have comparatively few educational advantages, and where they would be better able and more disposed to preserve their native customs and languages, we might have a racial problem in the South more difficult and more dangerous than that which is caused by the presence of the negro." *

But whether the result be an amalgamation or a mixture, it is evident that the nation will be profoundly altered by the addition of large numbers of persons with alien habits and ideals, and that the social and political structure will be changed accordingly. Dr. LeBon, in the work above quoted, says:

"A preponderating influence of foreigners is a sure solvent of the existence of States. It takes away from a people its most precious possession—its soul. When aliens became numerous in the Roman Empire it ceased to be."

And again:

"It was a very sure instinct which taught the ancients the fear of strangers: they well knew that worth of a country is not measured by the number of its inhabitants, but by the number of its citizens."

Can we not already see certain effects of the newer immigration upon our social life? In many places the Continental Sunday, with its games and sports, its theatrical and musical performances, and its open bars, is taking the place of the Puritan Sabbath. In some of our factory towns there are many operatives living under the system of free marriage, and in at least one place the method of building tenements has been altered to correspond to this system. Professor Commons notes that we have already begun to despotize our institutions in order to deal with large masses of citizens not capable of intelligently supporting representative government. We see, also, the phenomena of political parties and groups on racial lines, with their own newspapers in

* The first part of this quotation is almost the exact language used by George Washington in a letter to John Adams, November 27, 1794. Of course, he was speaking of the relatively homogeneous immigration of his day.

foreign languages, seeking representation as racial units precisely as in Austria. These groups have already taken a conspicuous part in opposing immigration legislation, already existing or proposed, which makes it more difficult for their friends and relatives to come here; and, under our political system, these foreign-born groups already hold the balance of power in many places. This means that they often divide, not on public policy, but on some matter of racial advantage. In any case they do not and cannot combine to make parties like those of the older population.

All these changes may be good or bad, but they cannot fail to impress us; and, if these changes rise above the swirling mass of events and catch our eyes, we may be sure that more profound changes are in process beneath the surface.

We have to contend not only with alien habits and ideals, and with the fact that these differences cannot be effaced by education in one or even two generations, but also with the fact that we are getting a great many immigrants who are below the mental, moral, and physical average of both our country and their own. A recent writer in a leading German review has said: "The immigration of the last decade has increased the number of hands, but not the number of heads, in the United States." While this may be an extreme statement, there is the unanimous testimony of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, the Commissioner at the Port of New York, and the Immigration Commission, which has recently spent several years studying the matter, to the fact that for one immigrant whose defects are so marked as to put him in the classes excluded by law there are hundreds, if not thousands, who are below the average of our people, and who, as George William Curtis put it, are "watering the nation's life blood."

Recent investigations in eugenics show that heredity is a much more important factor than environment as regards social conditions—in fact, that in most cases heredity is what makes the environment. This is confirmed by the practice of the insurance companies which attach the chief importance to the hereditary characteristics of an individual. If this position is sound, education and distribution can only palliate the evils and delay fundamental changes. As Professor Karl Pearson says: "You cannot change the leopard's spots, and you cannot change bad stock to good; you may dilute it, possibly spread it over a large area, spoiling

good stock, but until it ceases to multiply it will not cease to be."

Intelligent foreigners, like Bourget, H. G. Wells, and LeBon, are continually surprised that Americans pay so little regard to these matters. Already our neighbor to the north has become much more strict as to those she admits than we are; and, in fact, the Dominion is now rejecting at the border many whom we have admitted. And in our own practice we are not very logical, for we are much more stringent in regulations as to importing cattle, sheep, hogs, dogs, and horses than we are as to human beings. The English sparrow and the gypsy moth were not considered dangerous when first imported, but by their multiplication have done serious damage. The history of the Jukes family in New York State shows how much harm can be done by immigration of a single pair of defectives.

The foregoing is not intended to be a pessimistic wail. Our people are successful in part because they are optimistic, and in general they have little use for prophets of evil. Nor has the writer forgotten for a moment either what the country owes to past immigration, or that much of the present immigration is desirable and valuable. But our optimism should not be blind. Sumner once said of Garrison that he would go straight ahead even if the next step were over a precipice. If there is a precipice ahead we should avoid it while there is time, not merely for our own sake, but that the United States may continue strong to uphold the cause of democracy and liberty throughout the world.

PRESCOTT F. HALL.